

National Heritage Team of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Oral History Program
Subject/USFW Retiree: Dan Stinnett
No. 03041107
Date: Wednesday, April 11, 2007
Interviewed by: Dorothe Norton

Dorothe Norton:

Okay, so I want to know the birthplace and date of you Dan.

Dan Stinnett:

My name is Dan Stinnett, and I was born in Wichita, Kansas on October 28, 1949.

Dorothe Norton:

And your parent's names.

Dan Stinnett:

My mother's name was Margaret and my father's name was Paul.

Dorothe Norton:

And what were their jobs and education?

Dan Stinnett:

My mother finished the 8th grade, and she grew up on a farm in southern Kansas. They didn't have much money, and I think there were 9 brothers and sisters so there wasn't enough money for any of them to go to high school. After she finished the 8th grade she started working in a dry cleaning shop, and she was a dry cleaner for most of her life, a very good dry cleaner. Then my father, he did finish high school in Wichita. He then was in the Army in the Second World War; he was in Germany with Patton's Army. And when he got out of the service he met my mother in 1948, and they got married. They then owned some businesses, the two of them did, they owned a bar and a bait shop in Wichita. They had a dry cleaning business after I had left to go to college; they opened up a dry cleaning business in Wichita. And then about the time that I was finishing up my military time in the Army they then moved to our farm in Kansas and they raised hogs. My mother died in October of 2003, and then my father died in November of 2006. So they had a great life on the farm.

Dorothe Norton:

So you spent all your early years there then in Kansas?

Dan Stinnett:

In Kansas; I am born and bred Kansas, but when I went in the Army in 1971. My wife, who also is a Kansan, we never really back, we never went back to Kansas. Don't know if we ever will or not, we'll see.

Dorothe Norton:

So how did you spend your early years? Did you have any fun things you liked to do, like did you play sports in school or play games with the neighbor kids, ball or?

Dan Stinnett:

Yeah, I did a little bit of sports. I wasn't very good at anything in terms of sports, I didn't have any height so I played a little golf, I wrestled a little bit when I was in high school, I played a little bit of baseball when I was younger but I didn't excel at sport, didn't excel school. Kicking myself quite a bit it seemed like. I was the only child and so I seemed to get along pretty fine by myself it seemed like. Didn't have any brothers or sisters, but I had some neighbors that I grew up with, absolutely. And, in fact, I still hunt with my neighbors that I grew up with. So I did a little outdoor hunting and fishing when I was a kid, grew up doing all of that.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you have any jobs before you graduated from high school?

Dan Stinnett:

Oh yeah, yeah. Before I graduated from high school I worked in a tree nursery and that was kind of fun. I worked for the Rock Island Railroad one summer as a crewmember of a section gang. That was really interesting, all 130 pounds of me trying to swing a pick and driving spikes. I wasn't very good at that either, but somehow or other they tolerated me. I also worked in the bait shop, a different bait shop than what my mom and dad had, but I worked in a bait shop. And I might have thrown newspapers a little bit too. So yeah, I tried a few things before I got out of high school.

Dorothe Norton:

And you mentioned hunting, did you also fish?

Dan Stinnett:

Oh yeah, absolutely.

Dorothe Norton:

Did your dad teach you how to do that?

Dan Stinnett:

Dad taught me how to fish and hunt both.

Dorothe Norton:

Oh that's very good.

Dan Stinnett:

My dad was a very, very good cat fisherman. We would run bank lines, trout lines all hours of the night, wade those rivers and all of that stuff. So yeah, he was a marvelous fisherman.

Dorothe Norton:

Well that's good. So what high school, where is it and when did you graduate?

Dan Stinnett:

I graduated from Southeast High School, Wichita High School Southeast in 1967.

Dorothe Norton:

And then did you go to the university?

Dan Stinnett:

Then what happened is I had a high school advisor that suggested I not go to college, that I should probably consider going to a technical school. That's because if I had a graduating class of 500, I was probably number 250. And that's about right; I was just about in the middle of everything.

Dorothe Norton:

Average?

Dan Stinnett:

Yeah, very, very average! So I unfortunately let this counselor convince me that maybe I wasn't going to make it in college. So I went to a junior college my first year in El Dorado, Kansas. It's called Butler County Community College. Now it turns out that that was a very good thing to have done. One is, the most important thing I guess, is that I kind of got my legs, I realized that yeah, I could make it in college. So I only spent a year at the junior college and then I looked for a university that was away from home, I didn't want to live at home anymore. And so I went to Fort Hays Kansas State University. It's out in the western part of Kansas, at Fort Hays, Kansas in fact, Hays, Kansas. And that again was a very good thing to have done because it was a marvelous university, and I had some great professors, and I just got totally absorbed there. I got a bachelors degree in zoology. And I worked for the university under student, what did they call that.... It was a 20 hour a week kind of a thing. I worked for the university for probably at least 2 or 3 years. But then I went to work for them all summer long between my junior and senior year. So I just really had a great experience at that school. I really got some very, very good theoretical training from that university.

Dorothe Norton:

And your degree is in zoology?

Dan Stinnett:

In zoology, I got a bachelors in zoology. Also I worked for the Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission is what it was called back then, this would have been in 1969. And that was between my sophomore and junior year that I had a summer job as a fishery technician aid is what I was, a fishery aid. And so I had some experiences with the state agency that way, I had some experience with the university that way. All related to my field as it turned out. So that's what I did when I got my bachelors degree.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you go on then to go for a masters?

Dan Stinnett:

And then after that, I had very low draft number, and so at that time, this would have been... I graduated from college in 1971. And with a low draft number at that time you were not allowed to go to graduate school and have any kind of a waiver from the draft. And so I had met this young lady in 1969, when I was working for Kansas Fish and Game, and here it was 1971, and I could see that the sooner that I hooked up with her the better. So I said, "Okay, well there's a lot of uncertainty here about what's going to happen to me, I think I'll just go down to the draft board and see what the chances are of getting picked up." And so they said, "Your chances were very good." So I then went in the Army in 1971. And I spent 2 years in the Army, I was a draftee, and I got out in 1973, in about July of 1973. And the young lady that I met when I was working for Kansas Fish and Game, we got married in 1972, so when I had my last duty station assigned to me and I knew I wasn't going to go overseas, then we got married and moved to Atlanta, Georgia. That's where my last station was, my last duty station.

So from there I applied for graduate schools, and my selection factor was to pick the graduate school furthest west that offered me money! Not exactly an academic standard! So I ended up at the University of Nevada in Reno. And my wife and I lived there from '73 to '75. So I got a masters degree in what was called renewable natural resources. So I have a little bit of range. I have a little bit of forestry, I have a little of wildlife, a little bit of fisheries, and a little of soils. So I have a little bit of variety in there in that master's degree. Unlike my bachelor's degree, my master's degree was very practical. My bachelor's degree was very theoretical. So I really had a lot of good theory that I'd learned about science. But when I got my bachelor's degree from Fort Hays and then when I got my masters degree it was a good mix because there it was much more practical, much more practical oriented, and so you got to actually apply a lot of things there.

Dorothe Norton:

So when you were in the Army did you ever have to go overseas?

Dan Stinnett:

I did not go overseas. Don't know why. I think they didn't know what to do with me. I already had a degree and most people with degrees became officers in the Army. Well, they wanted to know if I'd be interesting in going to Officers School and I asked them, "Well, how long would I have to stay in?" And they said, "Well, it would be a 3 year commitment." Well, when you're drafted it's a 2 year commitment. And in 1971, there were some strange things going on with new officers in Vietnam, and a lot of them were getting shot in the back. And so I thought, "Well, I'll just take my chances here and I won't go for this officer thing." So what they did is they, again I don't think they knew what to do with me, but they tried to figure out what they felt like I could do best for the military. And it turned out I became an Army medic. And so I got some very good training and I became a very good medic. In fact, I was at Walter Reed in Bethesda,

Maryland. I was on a cardiac arrest team and probably could have stayed in Bethesda, Maryland had I not decided it was time to get married. The Navy would have kept me I think until I'd finished my 2 years. And so then I ran an internal medicine clinic and I helped a flight surgeon do autopsies and I got into the medicine thing pretty good when I was in the Army. So that's what I did when I was in the military.

Dorothe Norton:

That's a world of knowledge about different things.

Dan Stinnett:

It was very good, yeah, yeah. It was great.

Dorothe Norton:

So did your military service relate in any way to your employment with Fish and Wildlife?

Dan Stinnett:

Well, in a way it certainly did. Number one I guess is that any veteran, at least back then, received at least a 5-point preference. If you were a wounded veteran you got a 10-point preference. And so when I was applying for federal jobs in 1975, I can't help but think that that 5-points had to help me somewhere, yeah. And then my medical training has always been something that I felt fairly good about. And had never really had to use it in the field necessarily since I worked for the Fish and Wildlife Service, but there'd been a couple of times that I'm awful glad I knew a few basic things. So that was applicable. And then I think my last 5 years as a supervisor, or actually last 10 years I was a supervisor in the regional office, some of that military training does help a little bit when it comes to make decisions, so yeah, yeah.

Dorothe Norton:

So where did you get married when you got married?

Dan Stinnett:

I got married in El Dorado, Kansas in 1972; May 29th, 1972.

Dorothe Norton:

And you have children you told me?

Dan Stinnett:

I have 2 children.

Dorothe Norton:

What are their names?

Dan Stinnett:

One of them is Emily, Emily is 28 years old, she is a social worker in Minneapolis; she works for a nonprofit organization called Project for Pride and Living. And she got her

bachelors degree from Syracuse University. She's a great kid and she has great compassion for human rights. Right now I think she works with a lot of Somalian's and she actually has clients that they service and things like that. But I don't know how long she'll stay, but she's been a social worker now for at least since she's been out of school, so that probably a good 4 or 5 years I guess.

Dorothe Norton:
And the other child?

Dan Stinnett:
Our son Graham is 23 years old. He is a graduate student; he's a history major at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg. He got his bachelors degree, graduated with a bachelor's degree from that university last year. And so he's on his first year of a 3 year master's degree program that he's in up there. And what he does afterwards I'm not sure. If he stays in Canada it wouldn't surprise me, he likes Canada.

Dorothe Norton:
Yeah, I liked Winnipeg pretty well too, it's so clean. I haven't been up there now for quite some time but I just remember how they always had people cleaning in the streets, sweeping everything up. And the parks, floral parks that they have up there, Assiniboine Park is one, beautiful flowers and very, very nice.

Dan Stinnett:
Oh yes that's gorgeous, that's right. There's a river that goes through there, it's called Assiniboine or something like it, you're right, you're right, it is gorgeous.

Dorothe Norton:
And it's not far from here, so you can always go to Canada without having to go to Toronto or all around.

Okay, well now we will go to your career. Why did you want to work for the Service?

Dan Stinnett:
Well, I never dreamed that I would work for the Fish and Wildlife Service. So it wasn't like, "I'm going to go to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service." I mean I felt like that my possibilities of ever working for this agency was probably not a very realistic expectation. In fact, I figured I'd always work for Kansas Fish and Game, I really did. But it was only because of the military time that I spent got me out of Kansas and found me a graduate school that was someplace other than Kansas. And so because I did get a masters degree in the west I had some familiarity with bureau land management, forest service, and some fish and wildlife service knowledge, park service too, based on that degree that I got out there. And so my first job that I worked for the federal government was actually for the Bureau of Land Management.

So I went to work for the Bureau of Land Management in 1975 as a range conservationist in Montrose, Colorado. A marvelous place, just a fantastic little town and great country over on the west slope.

Well, I did enjoy my time with the Bureau of Land Management, I wasn't sure whether or not though I was going to really be able to apply my degrees in zoology and in renewable natural resources to the extent that I thought I maybe could. And so in just a quirk of fate it turns out that there was a young man who had worked for the BLM, transferred over to the Fish and Wildlife Service and wanted to come back to the Bureau of Land Management. They liked him, he was a wildlife biologist, and I guess he didn't like his stay with the Fish and Wildlife Service, so he was trying to get back to BLM. And so that opportunity arose and I said, "Well, the Fish and Wildlife Service, you'd better believe it!" This boy would just jump at the opportunity to go work the Fish and Wildlife Service. So I did.

I went to work for the Fish and Wildlife Service and I worked for Ecological Services in Tulsa, Oklahoma. I started in 1976, and worked for an outstanding Ecological Services field supervisor named Pete Wilkirson.

Dorothe Norton:
Pete who?

Dan Stinnett:
Wilkirson, Sydney Wilkirson. He has a picture hanging in the NCTC.

Dorothe Norton:
Oh they do?

Dan Stinnett:
Yeah, yeah. He's dead now but he was a marvelous man. And, in fact, I think that he may have hatched 5 field supervisors. Charlie Scott, who was field supervisor in Columbia, Missouri, myself, Jerry Brabander, he's still a supervisor, he's now a field supervisor in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Bob Short, field supervisor in Arlington, Texas, he's now retired. And possibly his 5th one will be Laura Hill, who's an assistant field supervisor in the West Virginia field office. So that's pretty amazing when you think over his tenure as a field supervisor in Tulsa that he ended up having 5 of us becoming field supervisors.

Dorothe Norton:
So where did you start with us then?

Dan Stinnett:
In Tulsa, Ecological Services in Tulsa. I started there in 1976. I tried desperately to get out of Ecological Services over into Refuges probably between '78 and maybe even '80. For a couple of years I really tried hard, had a drawer full of pink slips. I don't know what it was. I think there was a lot of tension there between Ecological Services and Refuges for some reason. There probably still is. But I just could not; I couldn't break

some kind of mold to get into Refuges. And so that would have been, I would have been in Tulsa probably 4 years, I just said, "You know what, your loss, not my problem. I'm going to quit worrying about it." And so I began to enjoy my time, thoroughly enjoy my time with Ecological Services. And I had a variety experiences in that office in Tulsa. And, in fact, would never have left Tulsa to tell you the truth. I probably would have stayed there based on the field supervisors that I had. And I had two while I was there, one was Pete and the other was Steve Forsythe. If I'd had another field supervisor just like those two there'd been no reason to leave. And, in fact, nobody wanted me to leave. I'm pretty sure nobody wanted me to leave.

But Rick Schultz, who was in the regional office in Minneapolis, was looking for a person to come into their Private Lands Program. And I had been a state coordinator, a state private lands coordinator in Oklahoma. So in 1990, I said, "I'm going to make a New Year's resolution." I did, I said "I'm going to apply for 3 jobs in 1990, and if I don't get any of those 3 jobs I'm going to sell our house, we lived in a small house in the center part of Tulsa, and move to the outskirts of Tulsa and we'll never leave here." So the third job that I applied for was with Rick Schultz and I got that job.

So that's how I became a person in the regional office in Minneapolis in 1991, moved here in March of '91. And I worked for Rick for a couple of years. In 1994, Rick then became refuge manager at Minnesota Valley. Well, it was never my intent to stay in the regional office. I was just going get there for a couple/3 years, understand how this region managed their Private Lands Program and then go someplace and become a private lands coordinator somewhere else.

Well, when Rick left we were in a little turmoil, there were a lot of things going on in 1994. If I remember right, I think that was the years I think there was an election that year or something was going on and there was some talk about possibly eliminating the Private Lands Program and USGS was assuming our cooperative research units. There were a lot things going on. And Bill Hartwig, in fact, was the regional director at that time; I think Bill was the regional director at that time. Anyhow, I was a little bit nervous that they might eliminate the regional coordinators position. And so I applied, I can't remember exactly the way it worked Dorothe, but I then became the regional coordinator for the Private Lands Program in Region 3, and that was 1994. And I stayed in that position for 5 years. So that would have been '99 as the regional private lands coordinator.

In 1999, I went to work in the regional office as an ecosystem biologist. Which was an interesting experience, I had the Mississippi River, upper Mississippi River, and I had the Missouri River teams. And I did very much enjoy those, very comfortable. I knew all the refuge folks, I knew all the ecological services people, and the fisheries folks.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you spend a lot of time in the field as opposed to behind your desk?

Dan Stinnett:

Well, I got out as much as I could; I'll tell you that, yeah. But I also knew that it was time for Dan to start doing something else. So I think that's why a lot of people kind of wondered my sanity. Why in the world I'd leave private lands and go to work as an ecosystem coordinator because there was a lot of uncertainty of what was going to happen to those jobs. But I really wasn't too afraid. I figured I'd land on my feet.

And then in 2001, I became the field supervisor of the Twin Cities ES Field Office, Ecological Services Field Office. A job I probably, to be honest with you, I probably should have taken, or at least applied for field supervisor jobs much earlier than I did. I think I probably was cut out to be a field supervisor more than anything, although I really did enjoy my time as a field biologist. I think that was a tossup.

Dorothe Norton:

Who was your supervisor when you were the field supervisor? Who did you report to?

Dan Stinnett:

Lynn Lewis, Lynn Lewis was my immediate supervisor in the regional office. And she is a dandy. She's exactly what we need in a regional office. She has field experience. She too has been in a field supervisor, and she's just very level-headed. Her depth is marvelous. There's nothing I can add. Seemed to have been unable to ask that lady that she couldn't figure out an answer for, so. She's perfect, just perfect, yeah. So that's who I worked for.

Dorothe Norton:

And then you retired in...?

Dan Stinnett:

And I retired in April of 2006.

Dorothe Norton:

That's when you became eligible for retirement?

Dan Stinnett:

Actually, I became eligible for retirement in 2003. Yeah, I had 30 years in 2003, my military time, BLM, and Fish and Wildlife Service. Actually, my 30 years with the Fish and Wildlife Service was probably not too much before my retirement, maybe March.

Dorothe Norton:

See I had 33 years too, but I did work for 4 years in Washington for the Navy Department.

Dan Stinnett:

Did you? Right, right. Well it's nice how it all adds up. And then I don't remember how much sick leave, I had over a years sick leave, so. But Dorothe I would still work for the Fish and Wildlife Service today, but I think I have told you that the reason I, as the only child, my father... We lost mom in 2003. My dad was living at the farm himself, and his health was deteriorating. And so my wife, bless her heart, when we got to looking at well, where should the priorities be here? Because we're up here in Minnesota, 10 hours away from the farm, and worrying about him down there by himself. She said, "Okay, maybe your priorities ought to be trying to do something with your dad here." So I left the Service prematurely. I won't deny it. But amazingly, 6 or 7 months later my dad passed away. Totally unexpected, ut I did manage to get 6 or 7 months there of every 2 weeks I'd go to the farm and 2 weeks I'd stay here at home with my wife, and it was pretty good.

Dorothe Norton:

Did your dad talk to you then too about how he wanted things if he passed away?

Dan Stinnett:

Oh yeah, yeah. And we'd kind of talk those things out too. But it made it a lot easier, you know. And to be honest with you, while I told my wife that well, I'll go down there and I'll spend some time with dad. I'll give him some company and I'll help those list of to-do's that he was so good at making that he really wasn't very good at getting done anymore because of his health. It turned out I think that just my being down there was the best thing. It was really best for me as much as it was him, you know. Because that way why when he started to really... We realized immediately that when it happened, he had a heart attack, which was so unexpected that yeah, I'm prepared for this. So it worked out alright.

Dorothe Norton:

So when you came to work for Fish and Wildlife what grade were you then?

Dan Stinnett:

I think I was a GS-7.

Dorothe Norton:

And when you retired?

Dan Stinnett:

GS-14.

Dorothe Norton:

Very good.

Dan Stinnett:

I never dreamed that I would ever make it past... I thought if I'd become a GS-12, that would be a pretty big deal for me.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you socialize with any of the people that you worked with?

Dan Stinnett:

Oh sure, yeah I had. The Tulsa office we were very close, particularly the first batch of us. In fact, I will tell you that my fond memories of the Fish and Wildlife Service will always go back to Pete Wilkerson, the field supervisor, and some very, very close friends that I made. Charlie Scott, **Jim Botdorf**, Michael Francis Smith, Jim Fossum, Forrest Dowler. We all bonded quickly. And we all came in about the same time, all about the same age. Forrest was a little bit older, but the rest of us were just fresh out of school, kids, and starting our lives. Yeah, the friendship that we made there was just incredible. I think about them every day.

Dorothe Norton:

And you're still friends with some of them?

Dan Stinnett:

Absolutely, oh yeah. But after that the regional office was so good to me, the regional office was just a real treat. I found the regional office and the people in the regional office to just be top notch. And you know you hear a lot of bad things about regional offices, Washington offices and all that sort of stuff, but I will tell you that people took such good care of me in the regional office. Oh they did, they did.

Dorothe Norton:

I think it has changed some now.

Dan Stinnett:

It maybe has, I don't know. All I know is I'll just remember how good it was. And I did socialize there, and it was always...

Dorothe Norton:

Did your career have any affect on your family?

Dan Stinnett:

Well, my career affect on my family was not that severe in terms of a lot of movement obviously, twp moves. But my daughter, it took her a couple of years to get over moving to Minnesota. Sometimes I look back and I wonder if I had stayed in Tulsa, if for her things might have been better. Now granted I mean she's got this great job and she's exactly doing what she should be doing, whether or not it would have been a little bit different for her. I think our son was still young enough when we moved that for him it didn't make any difference.

Dorothe Norton:

So what kind of training did you receive when you came to Fish and Wildlife, anything different than what you already had learned and did in your other jobs?

Dan Stinnett:

Oh yeah, I got a lot more training in the Fish and Wildlife Service on aerial photography interpretation, something that I had really not experienced that much before. I did a lot of field work. My field supervisor, both of them in Tulsa pretty much gave me free reigns. And I worked a lot with the Department of Agriculture. We did a lot of wetland inventory work. I did a couple of special research studies when I was in the field. And then I must admit that the Fish and Wildlife Service gave me plenty of opportunities for becoming a supervisor, lots of good training. I also taught some Ecological Services basic training courses, and they gave me some very good training in how to be a presenter of information. And I thought that was very invaluable. So yeah, I had plenty of opportunities for training.

Dorothe Norton:

During your time in Refuges and all did you ever work with any animals?

Dan Stinnett:

Well, in Refuges I did not as it turns out. But in Ecological Services you bet, yeah in Ecological Services there's hardly, well I'd say that stretching it a little bit. But the state biologist for the Soil Conservation Service in Oklahoma and I and another watershed biologist, whatever chance we'd get to seine a stream, we were seining. So I got to count a lot of fish and I got to identify a lot of fish when I was in Oklahoma. We also did a little small mammal kind of work. And then because we were kind of an on-call office, the phonebook told people that when they had owls in their houses or squirrels or anything else they were to call us. And so yeah, I got to mess with a few birds that got in people's houses and things like that, but nothing too exceptional in terms of handling animals for me, no.

Dorothe Norton:

And didn't bother you to work for the animals?

Dan Stinnett:

Oh no, no.

Dorothe Norton:

What kind of support did you receive locally, regionally, and federally, like when you were in these field offices or areas even though you were in the regional office? But how did you feel the support was from?

Dan Stinnett:

Do you mean within the agency or outside?

Dorothe Norton:

Outside too.

Dan Stinnett:

Oh, great differences. That's a good question. Working in Oklahoma compared to working in Minnesota was like night and day. I love Oklahoma and I love the people in Oklahoma, but there are some parts of that state that they are not the most environmentally attuned. Minnesota, on the other hand, you can come here and you read the newspaper and there are people that are still concerned about their environment and they think about their environment. And so there's a real contrast it seems like there between what I experienced in Oklahoma compared to what I experienced in Minnesota. So yeah, I'd say there was a lot more support for Service. There's a lot more presence of the Service though in Minnesota than there is down there.

Dorothe Norton:

How do you think the Service was perceived by people outside of the agency?

Dan Stinnett:

Well, in Ecological Services the perception of Ecological Services in the outside is that we are sometimes looked at as being intruders on private development. And sometimes that's true, yeah. Refuges, on the other hand, particularly in Private Lands, and I had the luxury of being in Private Lands for so long, there the public, I think, and the Congress and everybody thinks that the Private Lands folks are just the best thing since sliced bread. And so again there was a real contrast between Private Lands and how the public perceives the friendly, cooperative method of working on private land compared to Ecological Services, which was more of a regulatory kind of a role, working with federal agencies that could affect private land. And there it was much more controversial in Ecological Services.

Dorothe Norton:

So what projects were you involved in?

Dan Stinnett:

Well, when I was Ecological Services in Oklahoma the major projects that I was involved with down there were water development projects; Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, large water reservoir kinds of development projects that affects huge acreages of lands and lots land, lots of private land, privately owned land. I was also involved with the Private Lands Program down there. I was the state private lands coordinator in Oklahoma from the initiation of that program in about 1985, until I left in '91. Also, I was heavily involved with all types of U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Bill related activities in Oklahoma, everything from swamp buster, sod buster, and any kind of watershed type of projects that the Department of Agriculture has. So smaller scale water development projects is what I worked on in Ecological Services. Whereas up here in the regional office I mainly worked on, certainly in the Private Lands Program, most of my work involved the 8 states and working with the state private land coordinators and working with the budgets and things like that.

Dorothe Norton:

Were there any major issues that you had to deal with?

Dan Stinnett:

Lots of major issues, the biggest issues that I had to deal with was my last position as the field supervisor in the Twin Cities ES Field Office. And there I dealt with at least 3 lawsuits. The first one came within the first 2 months of my job. It involved wolves, Canada lynx. And those two species particularly seem to be kind of hot buttons for environmental groups to rally behind. And so the most controversial issues that I ever was involved with as a field supervisor was probably Voyageurs National Park snowmobiles, wolves and a biological opinion that had been written.

Dorothe Norton:

So those issues were all resolved?

Dan Stinnett:

We managed to resolve them through the Appeals Court. I had some good solicitors in the attorney's office that saved my rear end, yep.

Dorothe Norton:

Who were some of the individuals who helped shape your career?

Dan Stinnett:

Well, I would say that I had a couple of professors at Fort Hays; Eugene Fleharty and Charles Ely. An ornithologist and a mammalogist that convinced me that being in this field, whatever it may involve, whether it goes a research end or whether government agency, university, or whatever, this is what I wanted to do. So, those two I would say were probably the two that probably really convinced me that yeah, this is something I want to do. And then when I went to work for the agency well certainly my field supervisor, Pete Wilkirson, without a doubt. With that kind of a person that you knew immediately that you would do your hardest to work for him, to do the best that you could. There was never any doubt that he was that kind of a person that you just wanted to perform for him, and he just had that ability to bring the best out of you. Pete was by far one of those people that will always stick out in my mind as having taken me under his wing. Certainly Rick Schultz did the very same thing for me when I came to the regional office. That boy took really care of me. He took awfully good care of me. And I think that he cared as much about me as I know Pete did about me. We had different settings, different kinds of environments, regional office-field office. But I think Rick and Pete, as supervisors, were very important to me. Now there were other people thought too that also big influences on me in addition to the people that I worked with, even people in other agencies sometimes that I was around would have an influence on me.

Dorothe Norton:

Do you remember who was president when you came with Fish and Wildlife or secretary of the interior or directors of Fish and Wildlife?

Dan Stinnett:

Well, let's see. Let's see if I can do this. I will you that I believe I think possibly Ford may have been president when I started with the Bureau of Land Management. And then Jimmy Carter, I think, became president not too far after that if I remember right. So that was president. For some reason Udall or somebody like that seemed to be the secretary of interior, but I don't know for sure.

Dorothe Norton:

Well that's okay.

Dan Stinnett:

Isn't that awful! And I never thought about any of that stuff back then.

Dorothe Norton:

I can't remember either.

Dan Stinnett:

I know that the director though was.... Who's our refuge guy that...?

Dorothe Norton:

I don't know.

Dan Stinnett:

Oh yeah you do, a fine guy, just an outstanding man that cares so much for the Fish and Wildlife Service. How embarrassing, I can't think of his name, I'll think of it.

Dorothe Norton:

Who was the regional director when you came to the Region 3?

Dan Stinnett:

At that time it was Jim Gritman. And then we went through a short period of time there with I think John Rogers might have acted for awhile and then Sam Marler came in and then Bill came in.

Dorothe Norton:

Sam Marler was regional director when I retired in '94. How did changes in the administrations affect the work that you were expected to do?

Dan Stinnett:

They definitely; and the higher I moved in position in grade and the more I began to be conscious of how administrations do affect us an agency. I was oblivious to it as a field

biologist, you know. It was just like, "I don't know and I don't care." It didn't make any difference to me. But once I got the regional office there was a lot more discussion about administrations and politics. It was something that I had not been exposed to in the field. And certainly my program, the Private Lands Program when I was in the regional office was definitely influenced by each administration. The way they looked at the work that we were doing as opposed to the regulatory role. So they were smiling on us as a program, and we grew incredibly in that '90 era, the Private Lands Program did. And then when I got back to the field office as field supervisor in Ecological Services, well again I got plenty of phone calls from politicians. So yeah, each administration, and I don't know whether its right or wrong, I always told that when you have a democratic administration you usually have a director that has come up through the ranks. Now this doesn't always hold true, obviously right now. But you usually in a republican administration will have somebody that is appointed from the outside, and it didn't always hold that way. But there did seem to be some fluctuation with each administration and how they looked at things.

Dorothe Norton:

In your opinion who were some of the individuals who helped to shape the Service?

Dan Stinnett:

Well, I can tell you without a doubt, in terms of the Private Lands Program that Bob Misso, without a doubt I know the history enough to know that if it were not for Bob Misso, the Fish and Wildlife Service may have missed out on an opportunity to have one of its most marvelous programs. Bob Misso shaped the Private Lands Program flat out. Ecological Services; Mike Spear was a Washington office administrator and he did, I believe, have great influence on Ecological Services in terms of its shifting away from what we used to be in terms of river basin studies to a program that was broader. So when I think at least in terms of Ecological Services and in terms of private lands on the national scale, those two are names that I definitely know have had big impacts. On a local scale I have to tip my hat to Don Hultman who, I think, really is a leader in terms of refuges and what he has for a vision. He was a huge instigator in putting together the vision document for refuges. And I think that document reflects Don and a lot of other big thinkers, ideas about refuges. And so Don Hultman will always be a name for me that I know was a driver behind moving refuges forward.

Dorothe Norton:

So what was the high point of your career with the Fish and Wildlife Service? Was there one?

Dan Stinnett:

Oh yeah, I had a lot of high points. Oh yes, lots of high points. I would say that becoming a field supervisor was probably the highest point. Because like I say, I think it was something that maybe in the back of my mind Pete Wilkerson knew that he wanted some of us to be field supervisors. And I think Pete wanted me to be one and I just fought it. I said, "No I can't do that, I don't want to do that." And so unfortunately he wasn't alive to see me do that but I wish he would have been. And I realize that like I

say, my last almost 5 years with the Service was as a field supervisor, but maybe it should have been the last 10 years instead of the last 5. I probably needed another 5 years as field supervisor is what I think. That was a huge high point Dorothe.

I had a huge high point when I was in Oklahoma. I worked on a project that was planned in 1950, and it was going to drain, I don't remember the number, but it was well into the tens of thousands of acres of wetlands in the southeast part of Oklahoma. And the project had been all constructed; all of the project had been constructed by the time I got to Oklahoma with the exception of, oh I don't know, 70 or 80 miles of drainage ditches. And it took me about 4 or 5 years, and close ties with Department of Agriculture biologists. And about the time I left Tulsa in 1991, a lot of information was coming out about that project, the cost of the project, where the money was coming from, how they were going to finish it, and what the losses were going to be in terms of wetlands. And within a couple of years that project was killed. So that was probably my high point in terms of what I've done for the environment.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you have a low point in your career? And if so what was it?

Dan Stinnett:

I must also tell you that a high point for me was the people that I've met. Probably everybody tells you that. But when I look back I don't particularly miss anything that I did with the agency, but I do miss the people. So that would have to be a high point.

Low point, the only low point that I can think of, and this sounds crazy I know, we had an area office concept at one time. And I don't remember when this was, you would remember, it was back in probably in the early '80's or whenever. We had an area office in Austin, Texas. Joe Higham was the area manager, and then there was an assistant manager who I don't remember, I just remember that that individual came to the field office. And I hadn't been working for the agency all that long, maybe 4 or 5 years, I guess that's long enough. But he said some things that just scared the "bee jiggers" out of me. He just came across as being so cocky, so confident. And I thought, wait a minute, this is a person that's our leader here. And I do remember that I, with another person in that field office, Forrest Dowler, after this gentleman had left I think I might have shed a tear, I was just so affected by what he had said. I was even surprising myself that I would let him do that to me. But I just felt like that I don't want to be around this guy. And if this is where the Service was going to go, if this was a reflection of what the Service was going to be like, I don't want to be a part of it. That was a low point. And obviously the area office has dissolved and none of it happened. I just, yeah, I remember going home pretty blue, yeah pretty blue.

Dorothe Norton:

Did you ever have a dangerous or frightening experience?

Dan Stinnett:

Yeah, one time, yeah, there's probably more than one, but one time Jim Andreasen and I, he was a contaminant biologist in the Tulsa office, we were in our contaminants, both collecting samples on the Arkansas River. And the motor quit. And there was a low water dam right in town. In fact, we were collecting fish right above the low water dam. And the river was really running that day, and I think Jim and I would have gone right over that low water dam, but we managed somehow or other to pull our way out of that rapid current. I think Jim might have gotten the motor started. But that could have been really ugly. Yeah, I think that one could have really been ugly.

I don't know that I had any close calls of any significance other than that one having been probably the greatest potential. Charlie Scott almost sunk our boat one time going underneath a bridge on the Hickory River. I told him I would never ride the boat with him again; bless his heart he didn't sink us. Probably boats and water were closer experiences to anything dangerous than anything else I'd ever done.

I did get the great opportunity to go to Alaska in 1989 on the oil spill. And there, there were some events that potentially could have been dangerous. We were out on the other side of the Shelikof Strait on the Alaska Peninsula at Becharof National Wildlife Refuge. And we had bear guards and we had grizzly bears around, no question about that, but they never acted like they were going to come get us or anything. But going back and forth in the weather in the little rafts that we were in, you know there were always possibilities of things like that happening. But no, I was pretty lucky.

Dorothe Norton:

Okay, then the next one is the other side, what was your most humorous experience besides the everyday occurrences?

Dan Stinnett:

Most humorous?

Dorothe Norton:

Maybe you didn't have the most humorous or can't think of it right now...

Dan Stinnett:

Yeah, the humorous, humorous, humorous... Boy, I don't know that I can think of anything that was overly humorous. No, nothing comes to mind. Well, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, okay. Here's a pretty good one. I always loved this one. Do you remember Matt Kerschbaum?

Dorothe Norton:

Yes, absolutely.

Dan Stinnett:

Well, Matt was celebrating his 50th birthday up there in the regional office, and everybody in refuges was all gathered around and we had a big room and a huge table.

And, oh man, I don't know, somebody had made Matt a cake and it was covered with black frosting. It was a huge cake, as big as this placemat. And gosh, I don't know this must have been about '94 or '95, somewhere around there, we were just having a great time. And I think JC Bryant was probably around, that crew. We just had a great time together. We were loud, I know we were obnoxious, but boy we had a great time. Anyhow, so we were getting ready to cut Matt's birthday cake. And of course we had the black balloons, we had all that stuff. So, somebody cut the cake and passed them around to everybody. I think there must have been like a little toast to Matt or something, but Matt was the first one to eat the cake. Well, so then after Matt started eating his cake everybody else started eating our cake. We were eating cake and then we got to looking at Matt, and you know Matt, he was funny, and he smiled a great big old grin. His teeth were just as black as night, just as black as they could be! So everyone is looking over at Matt just, "Look at that guy!" And then everyone was grinning. And then we started looking around the whole table and everybody else's teeth were just as black as they could be! It was just hilarious, it was. Yeah, that was great, that was a humorous time.

Dorothe Norton:

What do you like to tell others about your career and about Fish and Wildlife Service?

Dan Stinnett:

Well, I like to tell them that it is a very meaningful career. Just like my daughter has a very meaningful career as a social worker, she has a passion for people. I think that this gave me an opportunity to complete a passion that I had I guess, and that's to do something outside, outdoors, for the environment. It's bigger than just hunting and fishing. In fact, I don't do a whole lot of that anymore. I really hadn't done a lot of that since I got out of high school. But it's understanding how critical our environment is to us to survive, and trying to be a part of the change that needs to be taken to assure longevity for our future generations. So being a part of that, that's what I like to tell them, is that yeah, yeah, meaningful.

Dorothe Norton:

What were some of the changes that you observed in the Service, like in the personnel and in the environment?

Dan Stinnett:

Well, I can't say we made great strides in the environment. I wish I could, but I think that global warming tells me that... They used to describe a spaceship, and as those tiles would fall off the spaceship that you could only lose so many before the spaceship would heat up and burn. And that was kind of the way that a guy named Paul Ehrlich would describe what our planet is like, it's like a spaceship, and we're losing these tiles. Well, here we are in the 21st century and we're definitely talking global warming. Which tells me my 30 years in the field of trying to reverse some changes in the environment isn't at the pace that it needs to be. And so I think that I can't say that what we did or what I did over those 30 years was of significance to where I can assure that longevity for the future. But I do think that politics is playing a greater role, or at least it seems to me that the politics is playing a very great role in our environment. Not just how our agency may be

influenced by the politics, but rather just politics in general. People know full well that we are doing things out here on the landscape that doesn't have anything to do with Fish and Wildlife Service. It could be everything from contaminating people, food, polluting our air. Not necessarily our mission as an agency. And yet politically they're turning their heads on these things because there are economic impacts from that. And so those are some things that I am absolutely seeing. And I don't know how we're ever going to reverse it until we have a disaster happen.

Dorothe Norton:

Where do you see the Service heading in the next decade?

Dan Stinnett:

Well, I think our Refuge Program, the Private Lands Program to me seem like they should have a bright future, I see them as becoming more and more important. As far as a fisheries program, I guess Dorothe I don't know enough about the fisheries program to be able to talk about it. I know that we have a lot of fish that are at risk. There are huge issues of fisheries. Again, I don't know enough about fisheries to know what will be the future for fisheries. Ecological Services; I'm a little concerned about Ecological Services. I'm not sure that I clearly, after my stint as a field supervisor, can tell you where I think that Ecological Services is going. That does not in anyway imply that it is not an extremely important program in the Fish and Wildlife Service. In fact, it is. But where it will 10 years from now I'm not sure, right now it's centered primarily around endangered species, contaminants, and federal projects. But I think that Ecological Services is going to have a niche somewhere in the future. But it may not be any of those three things. I don't know, I just don't know. So I can't forecast Ecological Services, I wish I could but I just can't. Also, just know the director's name that I was trying to think of when I came in was Lynn Greenwalt.

Dorothe Norton:

Okay. So who else do you think we should interview? I mean anybody that you think would be great to be given an interview? I'm trying to do as many as I can, especially some of the older ones before they pass away, and some of them that still have good memories.

Lynn introduced me to a man named Robert Schmitz, and he's in Yankton and he's 90. And I'm going to go out there but I just now got my travel authorization, so I couldn't go without the travel authorization. But I will do several; there are 4 in Yankton and a couple in South Sioux Falls, and another one up in a little town just a little north of Sioux Falls. So I do intend to go out there when the weather provides good days.

Dan Stinnett:

Well, I can't think of anybody, particularly up here that I came across who you may not have at least known.

Dorothe Norton:

Well, I'd love to go do Steve Forsythe, and there were some others down...

Dan Stinnett:

Well, I guess that's my question, is somebody that does Region 2 kinds of interviews?

Dorothe Norton:

Well, yes and no.

Dan Stinnett:

Is that right? Wow!

Dorothe Norton:

I can do as many as I want. I can go wherever I want even if I don't get the mileage. See they pay my mileage, but if I don't get mileage for it I don't even care. What I try and do is always make it a little trip so I can do 7 or 8 at the one time. So I may go down there and do that.

Dan Stinnett:

Oh, how interesting. Well, there is a man named Forrest Dowler.

Dorothe Norton:

And where is he?

Dan Stinnett:

Forrest is in Claremore, Oklahoma.

Dorothe Norton:

Where is that?

Dan Stinnett:

Real close to Bartlesville. Yeah, Claremore is north of Tulsa, Bartlesville is north of Tulsa. So, if you could somehow or other do Forsythe, who I'm going to see him in about a week and half, we're going turkey hunting together. But Forrest Dowler, former Fish and Wildlife Service employee, he probably left the Service after a good 20 years I would say, a fishery biologist, a heck of a fine man.

Dorothe Norton:

Well thanks Dan so much, I'm glad you had the time we could do this.

Dan Stinnett:

Thank you Dorothe.

UNVERIFIED: Jim Botdorf (pg 11);

KEY WORDS: Dan Stinnett, Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission, fishery technician aid, zoology, renewable natural resources, Bureau of Land Management, forest service, fish and wildlife service, park service, range conservationist, Ecological Services, National Conservation Training Center (NCTC); Sidney "Pete" Wilkirson, Charlie Scott, Jerry Brabander, Robert "Bob" Short, Laura Hill, Stephen Forsythe, Rick Schultz, Private Lands Program, state private lands coordinator, Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, Bill Hartwig, United States Geological Survey (USGS), Region 3, regional private lands coordinator, ecosystem biologist, field supervisor, Twin Cities Ecological Services Field Office, Lynn Lewis, Michael Francis Smith, Jim Fossum, aerial photography interpretation, Department of Agriculture, wetland inventory work, Soil Conservation Service, watershed biologist, seine a stream, Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation, water development project, swamp buster, sod buster, wolves, Canada lynx, Voyageurs National Park, snowmobiles, Jim Gritman, Jim Rogers, Sam Marler, Bob Misso, Ecological Services, Mike Spear, river basin studies, Don Hultman, Joseph Higham, James Andreasen, Charlie Scott, Shelikof Strait, Alaska Peninsula, Becharof National Wildlife Refuge, Matt Kerschbaum, Forrest Dowler, JC Bryant, Lynn Greenwalt, Robert Schmitz, Steve Forsythe,